

Iraq Cultural Heritage Initiative

Previous Efforts: 2003 – 2008

The Department of State is committed to working with the people of Iraq to protect and preserve the rich heritage of their ancient legacy. Since 2003 the Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs has provided diverse support for Iraqi cultural heritage, leading up to the Iraq Cultural Heritage Program (ICHP) that was launched in October 2008. Several of these efforts are continued today through ICHP and additional pending programs.

The Iraq National Museum, the Iraq National Library, and the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) have been primary beneficiaries. Also, significant progress has been made in the protection of archaeological sites in Iraq and in the fight against illicit international trafficking of Iraq antiquities.

Iraq National Museum

In 2003, emergency support was provided for the purchase of computers, and photographic and other equipment. In addition, 4 experts in museum security, environmental control, conservation, and information technology were sent to Baghdad to conduct a needs assessment at the museum. The assessment report called for improvements to the physical infrastructure and communications systems, carried out in 2004. These included electrical, plumbing, climate control, and structural repairs; and the installation of a computer network and communications equipment.

Also in 2004, a plan for a CPA-Iraqi Museum Security Plan was developed, and protective gear was provided to improve the personal safety of museum guards. Through an on-going collaboration with museum staff, a museum Web site in Arabic and English is being developed.

Iraq National Library and Archives

In the autumn of 2003, a team from the Library of Congress conducted a [needs assessment](#) of the Iraq National Library and Archives. Shortly thereafter, in early 2004, Library staff were provided with museum supplies, including cameras, laptop computers, reference books, and conservation materials, such as a special vacuum and sponges. In 2007, environmental controls were put in place as a preventive measure to support the long-term stability of the collections.

Training and Consultative Visits for Iraqi Cultural Heritage Professionals

In the spring of 2004, a 5-week program provided training in the United States for 22 Iraqi professionals in the fields of museum management, curatorial practice, and conservation. In early 2005, three senior Iraqi cultural officials from the SBAH came to the U.S., through a program organized by the Department of State's International Visitors Leadership Program. They used the opportunity to confer with colleagues at U.S. museums and academic institutions on the development of opportunities for collaboration in museum practices and site management. In 2006 and 2007, 6 Iraqi museum professionals participated in a Museum-to-Museum Partnership Program to engage with American counterparts. Two Iraqis participated in three programs: cuneiform tablet and ivory conservation at the Walters Art Museum (Baltimore); fundraising and organizational development at the California Science Center with the Japanese American National

Museum (Los Angeles); and education and collections management in Chicago – at the Chicago History Museum, the Field Museum of Natural History, and the Oriental Institute.

In 2005, the Library of Congress organized a Library Conservation Training Program that brought a small group of Iraqis to the U.S. In 2006, the Director General of the Iraq National Library and Archives visited the U.S. to discuss possibilities for collaboration on the conservation of collections.

Protection of Iraqi Archaeological Sites

In Spring 2004, a new archaeological site protection plan was implemented, and communications equipment and vehicles were provided to site guards in the regions of Nasiriyah and Diwaniyah. From 2005 to 2007, in collaboration with Stony Brook University, a Satellite Imagery Acquisition project provided large amounts of high-resolution satellite imagery of the archaeologically rich area of southern Iraq to enable the SBAH to monitor the impacts of looting and other disturbance, and to develop site protection and management strategies. In 2008, also in collaboration with Stony Brook University, the Archaeological Map of Iraq Project was launched. Remote sensing, digital mapping, and image enhancement techniques will be used to create a new interactive map for locating and inventorying archaeological sites, which will support future efforts of the SBAH as they work to safeguard sites against looting.

Fight Against Illicit Trafficking in Iraqi Antiquities

The [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1483](#) is being implemented in the U.S. through the Department of Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), in consultation with the Department of State. Since August 1990, by Presidential Executive Order, sanctions have prohibited the importation into the U.S. of any cultural objects from Iraq. The [Emergency Protection for Iraqi Cultural Antiquities Act of 2004](#) authorizes the President to impose [U.S. import restrictions](#) on Iraq's cultural property. This presidential action was implemented by the Departments of State and Homeland Security in 2008.

In spring 2005, a workshop was held to promote cooperation between U.S. and foreign law enforcement entities in the recovery of artifacts illicitly taken out of Iraq. An [Emergency Red List of Iraqi Antiquities at Risk](#) was published by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Spring 2003 (reprinted in 2005 and 2008). The brochure helps customs officials, police, and art dealers identify types of objects that are vulnerable to theft, or that may have been unlawfully removed from Iraq. Printed copies in English, French, Spanish, and Arabic have been distributed world-wide.

In 2006, investigators with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement recovered the famous statue of Entemena, an early Mesopotamian ruler, which was stolen from the Iraq National Museum in April 2003. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security returned the sculpture to the Iraqi people in a [July 2006 repatriation ceremony](#) attended by Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. An additional 1,102 Iraqi antiquities recovered in 2001 were returned to the Iraqi people in a [September 2008 repatriation ceremony](#). Since then, at the request of the government of Iraq, a project for the conservation of seized Iraqi artifacts has focused on documenting, stabilizing, and conserving the repatriated objects so that the fragile collection can be transported safely to Iraq.